

Iraq elections

Sgt. Sean Kimmons
25th ID (L) PAO

KIRKUK, Iraq – Prior to Iraq's first democratic elections, Soldiers from Task Force 1-21 Infantry and their counterparts in the Iraqi Security Forces, conducted multiple security operations to ensure safety on Election Day here.

Throughout the month of January, TF 1-21 Inf. and the Kirkuk ISF carried out 12 joint operations that contributed to the capture of 89 suspected terrorists within the city.

"[TF 1-21 Inf.] took an offensive posture in order to disrupt Anti-Iraqi Force plans and attacks targeted at the elections," said Capt. Stephen Brown, assistant S3 for TF 1-21 Inf.

One of those key joint operations occurred on Jan. 28, when 21 suspected terrorists were detained in raids. The early morning operation was headed by the Iraqi Police Emergency Services Unit.

"The ISF definitely stepped up for the elections," Brown



Photos by Sgt. Sean Kimmons

Above, Iraqi Police officers proudly display their ink-covered fingers after they casted their ballots in Kirkuk. Below, Capt. William Hampton, commander of Co. B, TF 1-21 Inf., questions a detainee who is believed to be responsible for a firefight against Iraqi Police officers Jan. 29 in Kirkuk, Iraq.

said. "The results showed [Jan. 30] when we had no complex or spectacular attacks. That was the result of a lot hard work from the Iraqis."



Capt. William Hampton, commander of Company B, TF 1-21 Inf., explained one such incident.

"We were calling for illumination in an area where there has been a lot of activity. In the middle of calling the illumination, we heard a burst [of gunfire] and saw the tracers going up [into the sky]," Hampton said.

Reports over the radio said that the Emergency Services Unit was under direct enemy fire. Hampton and his convoy then left their area and picked up a field-line ambulance in route to where the incident was taking place.

When Hampton's convoy rolled up to the

scene, one of his company elements and an ESU team cordon and searched a house where the alleged gunman was believed to be hiding in. One man with an AK-47 was detained and questioned about the incident.

No Soldiers or ESU personnel sustained any injuries in the firefight. Unfortunately, a 17-year-old girl was the only casualty and died from a stray bullet that hit her in the chest.

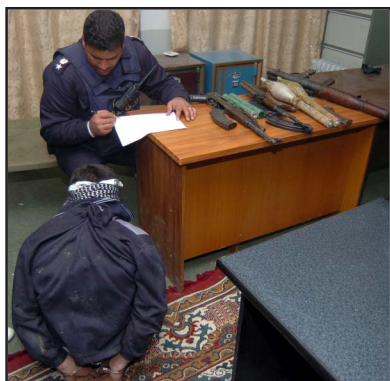
"She was in a house and the bullets came through the brick wall," Hampton said. "All the Soldiers and ESU fired north. [The insurgent] was the only one who fired south and that's where the fatality happened."

Sadly, civilians on the battlefield typically become the casualties in these incidents when they arise in a populated urban setting.

On another note, TF 1-21 Inf. completed several planning sessions with Iraqi emergency medical services to make sure the city would be prepared to handle a mass casualty situation, Brown said.

TF 1-21 Inf. Soldiers even provided security for the move-

See IRAQ, Page 27



An Iraqi Police officer questions a suspected terrorist on the weapons cache (right) found by Iraqi Police officers in the trunk of his car Jan 29 in Kirkuk, Iraq.



Staff Sgt. Luis Parra, a NBC NCO with Co. B, TF 1-21 Inf., spreads out a weapons cache found by Iraqi Police during a traffic control point Jan. 28 in Kirkuk, Iraq.

29 Jan - On the last day before elections I try to spark up conversation with as many local nationals as I can. Overall they all seemed enthusiastic about their "great day" as one man called it. In a country where having a cellular phone or camera is a "great freedom" voting is a source of a lot of excitement. I know that of course, that all of Iraq doesn't share these few people's thoughts. Maybe, a lot of Iraqis are sick of all the fighting, the explosions, and the death and destruction that daily life here consists of. Maybe voting is their chance to take some control of the violence.

The gravity of this operation occurred to me while I was chatting with a local national who works for the new government. He overflowed with optimism about Iraq's future and the eventual defeat of the insurgency. Blood, sweat and tears or otherwise, friendly or enemy was ultimately shed in the struggle to hold elections or block them. **Sgt. Steve S. MEDEIROS**, 31B20 3rd Squad, 1st Platoon, 272nd Military Police Company, 720th Military Police Battalion, 42nd Military Police Brigade.

29 Jan - None of the internees were speaking of the election but were playing their games like football, volleyball, as normal.

At 2100 the internees went into their tents as if there was a curfew implemented. Only five internees were out and about which left an eerie taste in my mouth. At 0115 we received 30 new new detainees from Abu Ghraib. Our shift ended at around sunrise. **Spc. C.M. Walton**, 105th MP BN HHC Camp Bucca, Iraq.

Day of Election - At approx. 0630, 3 mortars impact in a parking lot/bus station across the street about 300 meters away. Iraqi police are dispatched to search a nearby cemetery for AIF who may have fired from there. The city seems totally different with only military and police traffic on the streets. Election center officials arrive early but there are already a lot of people walking to the election centers. ING and the IP set up search

points to screen all voters. There are a few large explosions that rattle the station even though they are far away. Apache helicopters circle the city all day. Iraqi policemen come up to us to proudly show off their black fingertips showing that they voted. There are a total of 5 election centers under Bab Al Sheik responsibility and all 5 centers report excellent voter turnout.

Everything in our sector was amazingly calm and quiet for Election Day. The polls closed at 1800 and the streets immediately emptied because of the curfew. It's a quiet night; the power is still out in most parts of eastern Baghdad. **DURAN**

A pretty nasty firefight breaks out and the ING officers bellow out some orders, a minute of utter chaos ensues, then they load up and are off to fight. The drivers of their pick-up trucks are already hitting the gas before all of their passengers' limbs are in the vehicle. They are mostly young seemingly optimistic Iraqis. They are quick to fight and to defend each other.. It is nice to see them roll out with an Iraqi flag flapping in the wind.

The quiet of morning is shattered by prayer call and then explosions in all directions. Radio traffic is non-stop and

reports of small arms fire, RPG and grenade attacks trickle in. There have been suicide attacks but not nearly the number that I had expected. There are reports of large voter turnouts in my AO. Sporadic gunfights and explosions continue throughout the day, but this is Baghdad and that isn't unusual.

Our medic treats a civilian with a nasty gunshot wound to his arm. The man expresses his gratitude as best he can with broken English and hand signs, and smiles. He is taken to a hospital.

The day drags on, much quieter than I would have expected. About 20 children play in the street with a soccer ball given to them by a passing patrol. In 10 months I don't recall ever having seen children play on this street (it's closed to some MNF). They use the C-wire blocking the road as boundaries and a makeshift goal.



Photo by Sgt. Sean Kimmons

A Kurdish boy celebrates Iraq's elections by waving a Kurdistan flag to on-coming cars in Kirkuk.

IRAQ Continued from Page 25

ment of election ballots to designated polling sites in the city.

"We just provided security and monitored the activity," said Sgt. Ivan A. Hernandez, a team leader with Co. B, TF 1-21 Inf. "We were secondary security, Iraqi Army was primary. We just over watched what they were doing and they did a good job."

Hernandez and his three-vehicle convoy secured the outer perimeter, while Independent Electoral Commission, Iraq (IECI) and Iraqi Army personnel delivered about 11,000 ballots to four polling sites on Jan. 28.

"I think it's cool, because we're part of history," Hernandez said about playing a role in the Iraqi elections. "Twenty-five years from now, I can look back and tell my grandchildren, 'what you read about in those textbooks, I was there. I experienced it personally.'"

There were a total of 131 polling sites in the city. Soldiers from Co. B, 65th Engineer Battalion emplaced force protection at 110 of those sites. To ensure security was tight on Election Day, TF 1-21 Inf. was augmented an additional 423 Soldiers to bring the task force up to more than 1,000.

"[We] also had 1,540 Iraqi Army and 2,947 Iraqi Police operating in the city for a combined total of 5,500 personnel," Brown said.

All of that hard work and planning was worth it, as the outcome from the Kirkuk elections was better than expected, Brown said.

"It appeared to be [a high voter] turnout. There were long lines at all of the [polling] sites.

"It was definitely a historic event. It all came together with all the different agencies involved," Brown said.